

Book review

Title: *Doctors of Deception: What They Don't Want You to Know about Shock Treatment*

Author: Linda Andre

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Reviewer: Laura K. Corlew

Linda Andre's book *Doctors of Deception* is an engaging journey through the modern day atrocity of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), more commonly known as shock treatment. She is a self-described "accidental activist" (p. 165) who has spent the better part of the last three decades attempting to bring patient rights into the foreground of this industry, or rather more to the point, *into* this industry. The stigma surrounding mental illness in this country, along with the fear associated with people who have mental illness, has led to a system in which people can be forcibly committed and treated against their will (including receiving ECT). Equally unjust, patients who do consent to ECT are not first informed of the extensive cognitive and memory risks associated with the treatment. The absence of an adequate informed consent process is largely due to the dearth of research into the dangers of shock.

Doctors of Deception is a chronicle of the evolution of the shock industry, from its early ties to the eugenics movement and pre-World War II fascism, to the modern Public Relations (PR) machine that obscures the intertwining financial ties to the leading psychiatrist practitioners who support it as a "safe and effective" treatment. Claims of a "newer" and "safer" ECT are nothing more than empty labels assigned to an unchanged process. In fact, many of the industry claims about the "new" ECT are unsubstantiated or purposefully false. Andre painstakingly researches the sources of these claims.

The most shocking detail of this history is that the industry has never conducted human or animal trials to determine either the safety or effectiveness of the treatment. Andre implicates the creators and manufacturers of the machines, the practitioners who use them, the American Psychiatric Association, and the Food and Drug Administration all for failing to conduct these trials despite both opportunity and obligation. This failure to act would perhaps be understandable were it not for the fact that ECT causes cognitive damage and permanent memory loss, as patients have been explaining to industry members and politicians for decades. Unfortunately both the industry and the general public seem to believe that mental health patients are unreliable, and therefore unworthy of belief in or protection from the irreparable brain damage they have consistently and persistently claimed to sustain.

Andre tells her own story within this system. She tells of the devastating (and gradual) discoveries that five years of her life had been erased from her memory, that her cognitive

processing abilities had been greatly damaged, and that ECT was the cause. She tells of the loss of her professional and personal memories, including the expert knowledge in published journal articles she does not remember writing, and the entirety of the depressive episode that supposedly warranted the administration of ECT. She tells of the months-long inability of her brain to form new memories after ECT, during which time she became an activist for patients' rights. She does not remember this early activism. Five years of her life are contained solely in the anecdotes of colleagues and loved ones.

Anyone who is interested in patients' rights, especially rights which are compromised due to the stigma of mental illness, ought to read *Doctors of Deception*. This thorough and well-researched history of the shock industry and the political and PR campaigns surrounding the industry is a fascinating, if horrifying, read.

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